

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A method for measuring a concentration of water in argon, hydrogen, nitrogen and helium by ionization mobility spectrometry (IMS), comprising the followings operative steps:

5 introducing a gas mixture to be analyzed into an IMS instrument (10) with a counter-flow of pure gas;

obtaining a signal (19) variable over time and proportional to a number of ions detected by an ion detector (14) of the IMS instrument (10);

10 determining two time intervals (A, B) corresponding to drift times in the IMS instrument (10) of H_3O^+ and $(\text{H}_2\text{O})_2^+$ ions present in the gas mixture;

obtaining peaks of the signal (19) in the two determined time intervals (A, B); and

calculating the water concentration in the gas mixture according to a ratio of intensity of the two peaks obtained in the signal (19).

2. The method according to claim 1, wherein the water concentration in the analyzed 15 gas is calculated by the following formula:

$$\text{ppb}_{\text{H}_2\text{O}} = K \ln ((\text{H}_B + \text{H}_A) / \text{H}_A), \text{ wherein:}$$

$\text{ppb}_{\text{H}_2\text{O}}$ is the water concentration in ppb,

K is a positive constant,

20 HA is the intensity of the peak of the signal (19) in the time interval (A) corresponding to the drift times of H_3O^+ ions in the IMS instrument (10); and

HB is the intensity of the peak of the signal (19) in the time interval (B) corresponding to the drift times of $(\text{H}_2\text{O})_2^+$ ions in the IMS instrument (10).

3. The method according to claim 2, wherein areas of the peaks are employed as measures of the intensity of the respective peaks.

4. The method according to claim 2, wherein heights of the peaks are employed as measures of the intensity of the respective peaks.

5. The method according to claim 1, wherein the two time intervals (A, B) corresponding to the drift times of the H_3O^+ and $(\text{H}_2\text{O})_2^+$ ions in the IMS instrument (10) are determined with a preliminary calibrating test carried out with values of operative parameters equal to those employed in an actual analysis.

6. The method according to claim 5, wherein the operative parameters comprise at least a temperature of the analyzed gas mixture.

7. The method according to claim 6, wherein the operative parameters further comprise an electric field in a separation zone (12) of the IMS instrument (10).

8. The method according to claim 5, wherein the analysis is carried out with gases at a temperature of 110 °C and with an electric field of 128 V/cm in a separation zone (12) of the IMS instrument (10), and the two time intervals (A, B) corresponding to the drift times of the H_3O^+ and $(\text{H}_2\text{O})_2^+$ ions in the IMS instrument (10) are between 15.5 and 17 ms (A) and between 17 and 19 ms (B).